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NEA/ARP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: KUWAIT WEDDING FIRE KILLS 43; AMIR CONDOLES,  
CANCELS RECEPTION OF RAMADAN WELL-WISHERS

Classified By: CDA Tom Williams for reasons 1.4 b and d

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Tragic wedding fire  
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¶1. (U) At 9:20pm on August 15, a fire broke out at a Kuwaiti wedding tent which killed 43 women and children and injured 90 others. According to local press reports, the ex-wife of the groom confessed to setting the fire, which consumed the entire structure -- which had only one exit for just under 200 people -- in only three minutes. The large wedding tent had been set up without a license in a crowded neighborhood of Jahra, a tribal area west of Kuwait City. Most of the victims were members of the large Al-Enezi tribe. Wedding parties in Kuwait are held separately for men and women, with children attending the women's event.

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Government Responds  
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¶2. (U) Kuwait's Amir, Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al Sabah -- whose mother hails from the Al-Enezi tribe -- has canceled his annual reception of Ramadan well-wishers out of sympathy for the victims, and PM Shaykh Nasser Al-Muhammad Al Sabah has visited the scores of injured, many suffering from severe burns, taken to local hospitals. Following its weekly session, the Council of Ministers issued a message of condolence that also praised the efforts by emergency service personnel in responding to the fire; foreign governments, particularly those in the Gulf, have sent official messages of condolence regarding the tragedy.

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Comment  
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¶3. (C) In Kuwait's politically charged climate -- and two months ahead of the reconvening of parliament -- criticism over the tragedy is being mostly directed at the GOK, both for failing to respond quickly enough to the fire, and for not effectively enforcing regulations requiring permitting (and associated safety requirements) for the erecting of such large wedding tents. (Note: There was also a wedding fire in Jahra last year, which killed two people. End note.). The Islamic Constitutional Movement, which holds one seat in the fifty-member parliament, issued a statement that the recurrence of wedding fires is a sign of poor governing by the GOK, while the Popular Action Bloc, which holds two seats, issued a statement condemning the Council of Ministers for not holding an emergency session to respond to the fire. Tribal Salafi MP Dr. Mohammed Hayef Al-Huwaila applauded the Kuwaiti firemen but accused the GOK of not doing enough to prevent such disasters. Dr. Aseel Al-Awadi and several other MPs called for an investigation into the fire and the government's response. More forebodingly, MP

Musallam Al-Barrak, who grilled the Interior Minister on June 23, said that the GOK's response to the disaster was negligent and lacked transparency.

14. (C) This tragedy recalls for many Kuwaitis the August 2007 Jahra Hospital fire which claimed the lives of two elderly patients and injured nineteen others. The fallout of that incident was the public castigation of then-Health Minister (now elected MP) Dr. Ma'asouma Al-Mubarak, who chose to resign rather than respond to the threats of grilling by Islamist MPs Faisal Al-Mislim and Waleed Al-Tabtabaie. The GOK, through its public statements in clear support of the Ministry of Interior, is seeking to signal to the Parliament and the public that a clear distinction should be made between the 2007 fire at the government hospital and the latest tragedy, a fire at a private, unlicensed -- and therefore illegal -- wedding party. End comment.

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WILLIAMS